

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend claim 192 and add new claims 212-224 as set forth in the complete listing of the claims and their status that follows.

Claims 1-191 (Canceled)

192. (Currently amended) A method of providing spinal interbody fusion, comprising the steps of:

accessing the intradiscal space between two generally opposed upper and lower vertebral bodies;

providing an expandable structure comprising a top element, a bottom element and a plurality of intermediate elements, each being of substantially similar configuration, said top element being configured to contact the upper vertebral body, said bottom element being configured to contact the lower vertebral body, and said intermediate elements configured to reside between said top element and said bottom element;

introducing said top element and said bottom element into said intradiscal space; and, individually introducing each of said intermediate elements consecutively between said top element and said bottom element such that an intermediate element contacts said top element and another intermediate element contacts said bottom element to relatively move said top element and said bottom element apart generally along the axis of the spine as said intermediate elements are introduced to thereby distract and support said upper and lower vertebral bodies.

193. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192, wherein each of said intermediate elements is introduced by sliding between said top element and said bottom element.

194. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192, wherein a first intermediate element is configured for interlocking coupling with at least said top element.

195. (Previously presented) The method of claim 194, wherein a second intermediate element is configured for interlocking with said bottom element and with said first intermediate element.

196. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192, wherein the top element has an area greater than an intermediate element.

197. (Previously presented) The method of claim 196, wherein the bottom element has an area greater than any of said plurality of intermediate elements.

Claims 198-208 (Canceled)

209. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192, wherein one of said top element, said bottom element and said plurality of intermediate elements is formed of implant materials.

210. (Previously presented) The method of claim 209, wherein all of said top element, said bottom element and said plurality of intermediate elements are formed of implant materials

211. (Previously presented) The method of claim 192, further comprising the step of introducing bone filler material between the two opposed upper and lower vertebral bodies and adjacent to and in contact with said expandable structure.

212. (new) A method of providing interbody fusion between two vertebral bodies of the spine, comprising the steps of:

accessing the intradiscal space between two generally opposed vertebral bodies; and

consecutively introducing individually a plurality of substantially similarly configured elements in contact with each other generally in the direction of the axis of the spine between the opposed vertebral bodies to distract and support such vertebral bodies along the axis of the spine until stability of the vertebral bodies is substantially achieved, said elements being

introduced by moving at least one previously inserted element to a different position by the introduction of a subsequent element.

213. (New) The method of claim 212 wherein said at least one element is moved by contacting a surface thereof with a surface of said subsequent element.

214. (New) The method of claim 213 wherein the accessing step includes the step of placing an elongated access channel in communication with the space between said vertebral bodies and introducing the elements through said channel.

215. (New) The method of claim 214, further including the step of providing a bone filler between the vertebral bodies in contact with the elements.

216. (New) The method of claim 213 wherein said elements are wafers, said wafers being introduced between said vertebral bodies by inserting a subsequent wafer below a previously inserted wafer so as to lift said previously inserted wafer upon insertion of said subsequent wafer.

217. (New) The method of claim 212, wherein said space between said vertebral bodies is accessed by an approach selected from the group of procedures consisting of anterior, posterior, posterior lateral and extrapedicular.

218. (New) The method of claim 216, wherein each wafer is generally flat and comprises a leading surface and an opposing trailing surface, and wherein said wafers are inserted by engaging the leading surface of a subsequent wafer against the trailing surface of a previously inserted wafer and applying a force to said subsequent wafer to lift said previously inserted wafer and place said subsequent wafer at least partially beneath said previously inserted wafer.

219. (New) The method of claim 218, wherein one of said leading surface and said trailing surface is beveled.

220. (New) The method of claim 219, wherein both said leading surface and said trailing surface are beveled.

221. (New) The method of claim 216, wherein the wafers are provided with complementary configurations to interlock said wafers upon insertion.

222. (New) The method of claim 212, wherein said elements are substantially rigid.

223. (New) The method of claim 212, wherein each of said elements includes a leading surface defining a lifting surface, and wherein said elements are introduced by placing a lifting surface of a following element against a surface of a preceding element and applying a force to said following element to lift the preceding element.

224. (New) The method of claim 212, further including the step of monitoring the tension in the annulus of the disc between said vertebral bodies as an indication of said stability.